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ABSTRACT

As a result of increasing interest in merging business and the humanities in the college curriculum and the efforts of many German and American organizations working together, a test was developed to measure the German language competence of American students planning to work for American companies trading with or located in West Germany or for German companies located in the United States. The test focuses on business management, economics, and special linguistic and cultural competencies needed for conducting business in Germany. The competencies are divided into five categories: reading comprehension of business texts, listening comprehension of business communications, speaking ability in business situations, and reproduction of a text from one language to another. German is used throughout the test, and there are no multiple-choice items. The primary evaluation criteria are quality of content, technical accuracy, and lexical knowledge. Grammatical details are given secondary importance. The test will be piloted in 1985 to determine how realistic it is for American students. It is suggested that similar sound measures in other languages will contribute to the credibility of the foreign langauge profession with the international business community. (MSE)

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International Cooperation--
The New German Business Diploma as a Model Project

Barbara Elling

"The walls between business and the humanities have been crumbling for some time now."[1] This statement does not come from an over-hopeful faculty member in the humanities, but from Roger Smith, Chairman of the Board, General Motors Corporation. In his keynote address for a conference on the topic, "The Humanities and Business: The Twain Shall Meet--But How?," held at Northwestern University in May 1984, Mr. Smith expresses his hope that the walls will in fact come "tumbling" down.

A number of factors are contributing or converging, all expected to result in renewed and increased attention to the importance of foreign languages. Nationwide studies of the American educational system have registered with alarm the previous sharp decline in the humanities and in foreign language enrollments linking this implicitly or explicitly to the decline in excellence in education in general. Business colleges have become conscious of the importance of the international component in professional training and have added appropriate courses or have turned to foreign language departments for cooperative arrangements. Private language schools are thriving and have waiting lists. Weekend total immersion programs offered by colleges near metropolitan centers (e.g., SUNY at New Paltz, New York) are becoming increasingly popular. Universities are reintroducing or strengthening the foreign language entrace or exit requirement and some states will be requiring a foreign language for a high school diploma. While the impact of these developments is as yet unpredictable, some positive trends are already emerging, for instance, a 4.5 percent increase in enrollments since 1980, according to 1984 data released by the Modern Language Association.[2]

The question of how the twain shall meet has occupied the academic sector for some time now. During the past ten years a number of successful international business programs with a strong foreign language and culture component has emerged, initiated and sustained by a small number of dedicated faculty members in foreign language and business departments. Particularly for Business German a considerble amount of good teaching material is

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available; seminars and conferences have helped train a cadre of instructors competent in the "new" teaching field. While the stigma of "vocationalism" still represents some difficulty in gaining acceptance, especially at research and doctoral-granting institutions, greater U.S. dependence on world markets and greater economic interdependence of the industrialized world will force universities to train future business and government leaders able to function in other cultures. The day might come when a tenure and promotion committee might weigh authorship of a business text as an important contribution from a humanities faculty member. For the time being, junior faculty at research-oriented institutions might still be best advised not to become involved in teaching language and culture courses for business programs.

Faculty members from German departments offering Business German realized from the start that without some sort of articulation and methods of student evaluation, we could not be optimally effective and would not have the necessary credibility in the business sector. The answer to our problem was found in the development of Das Diplom Wirtschaftsdeutsch für die USA (German Business Diploma for the USA) which will be administered for the first time in 1985.[3] The successful cross-Atlantic collaboration in test development, which took place between 1981-1984, is perhaps unique and is briefly described below in its most important stages.

Seminars and conferences on the topic of Business German were held at the University of Cincinnati from 1975-1980 with the support of the Goethe House, New York. Discussions about a German Business Diploma began at the 1977 annual conference of the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) with Ray Schaub (Eastern Michigan University), Alan Galt (University of Cincinnati) and Manfred Heid (Goethe House, New York) participating and thus serving as the "founding fathers" for the probject German Business Diploma.

In 1981 German professors from institutions which offer Business German as course(s) or degree programs were brought together with representatives from the Goethe-Institutes Atlanta, Boston, New York City and Rome; the Carl Duisberg Society of New York and the Carl Duisberg Central, Köln; and the German-American Chamber of Commerce, New York. During the seminar, funded by the Goethe-Institut, the groundwork was laid for the

- constituencies to be involved and type of involvement,
- possible sources of funding,
- objectives and general content of the test, Diplom Wirtschaft für die USA

Additional meetings organized by Rau Schaub were held at Eastern Michigan University and the AATG conventions.[4] In 1982 an intensive working seminar was held at the University of Florida. Rosemarie Buhlmann, an expert for subject specific language testing from the Goethe Institut, Munich, began to work with the group on the test objectives and desirable competency levels. The link to the AATG was officially established at this juncture with the result that the working group became an AATG standing committee. Gerhard Weiss, President of the AATG acted on behalf of the Committee for Business German, when he requested project funding from the Goethe-Institut, Munich, and the Carl Duisberg Centren, Köln. The German-American Chamber of Commerce, New York, supported the request and pledged future cooperation. The response from Munich and Köln was positive and the project--years spent in planning, years to be spent in test development--could start. The contractual arrangements agreed on in 1983 and made public in 1984 identify the partners: AATG; Goethe-Institut, Munich; Carl Duisberg Society; the Carl Duisberg Centren; and the German-American Chamber of Commerce. Furthermore, the contract identifies the test's objectives, contents, the conditions and control procedures, as well as all technical and administrative details. Beginning February 1983 Sabine Steglitz, a testing expert from the Goethe-Institut, Munich, spent a year in the U.S., working at universities with strong German Business programs, at the German-American Chamber of Commerce and the Goethe Institutes, Houston and New York. Once the necessary consulting had been completed, authentic materials were collected, reviewed and sorted in accordance with the test objectives and modalities previously agreed on at several meetings.

The test is designed for American students who plan to work for

- U.S. companies trading with companies in the F.R.G.
- German companies (or their subsidiaries) located in the U.S.
- U.S. companies located in the F.R.G.

Test objectives are cognizant of these broad career goals and focus on the areas of business management (Betreibswirtschaft), economics (Volkswirtschaft)

and special linguistic and cultural competencies needed for conducting business in Germany (Wirtschaftliche Landeskunde). The competencies required and tested were divided into five broad categories, each tested by a number of sub tests:

- reading comprehension of business texts,
- listening comprehension of business communications,
- the production of written texts, e.g., letters, Telex, informal inter-office communications,
- speaking ability in a business context,
- the reproduction of a text from the target language into the native language, not meaning translation.

The text examines the following broad areas:

- typical organizational structures and functions of companies (Betreibswirtschaftliche Strukturen und Funktionen,
- the companies' organizational objectives (Geschäftsaufgarben des Unternehmens), e.g., Marketing (Absatz)--here the topics range from export to sales personnel to marketing strategies to marketing research and to advertising,
- management objectives of companies including all aspects relating to personnel (Managementaufgaben des Unternehmens).

An important section dealing with Volkswirtschaftliche Landeskunde; that term might be translated as "economic life" or the "business climate" in the F.R.G. The study of the German social market economy and the economic and social forces characterizing it are a major objective in most German business courses in the U.S., particularly as the economy relates to social benefits, labor policies, the work environment and foreign workers. Each of the above categories is broken down into specific subcategories. The subcategories are classified in accordance with the three different career goals or "needs group," specified as the diploma's Zielgruppe or future testees. The agreed upon categories then become the basis for the test content (Stoffkatalog). The linguistic skills necessary for the test were divided into broad skill areas:

The Receptive Skills

1. Tested here is the comprehension of written texts such as newspapers, informational material (provided by such organizations as chambers of

commerce), advertisements, technical texts, business forms, graphs and flow charts. It is assumed that the student can absorb a high volume of information, can read selectively and interpret a given text or graph. All materials are authentic.

2. Comprehension of spoken texts such as business news reports, contract talks and negotiations, verbal interaction within the company or with business partners. It is assumed that this form of interaction is not limited to basic business conversations, but includes comprehension of a variety of speaking styles and technical terminology. Again all material is authentic.

The Production Skills

1. Writing of texts for inter-office communications as well as business letters and Telex (roughly 90% of all business communication in German business is done through Telex).

2. Reproduction of a written text from L_2 to L_1. Literal translation is not a testing objective, since the objective is the transfor of knowledge and informatin (Informationsvermittlung). This can be done as a summative statement or in detail, depending on the particular situation.

3. Production of verbal communication in conversations, contract negotiations, request for information, and information exchange. This skill can be tested in interviews and can utilize role playing techniques; it is one of the more problematic testing areas, particularly since the interviewer (a faculty member in all likelihood) would not conduct the interview on as technical a level as it would be done in an actual business setting. Speaking about and interpreting charts as well as answering questions is another skill tested here.

Additional subtests evaluate competency in such areas as technical vocabulary (Fachlexik and translation skills (L_2 to L_1). The vocabulary is tested in the German context without asking for the English equivalent. Items include matching questions, fill-ins in partially complete tables and the completion of flow charts.

Technical vocabulary never appears in isolation.

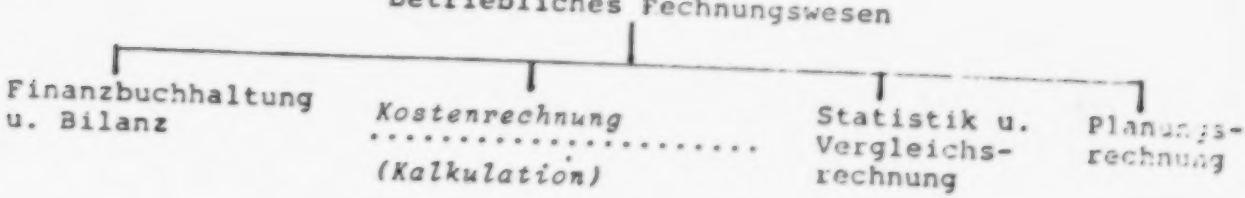
The following sample items (1-7) make clear the method of testing business vocabulary. Correct answers appear in italics.

Lösungen

CHART 1

Bitte ergänzen Sie die Lücken oder verbinden Sie zusammengehörige Begriffe mit einem Pfeil.

1



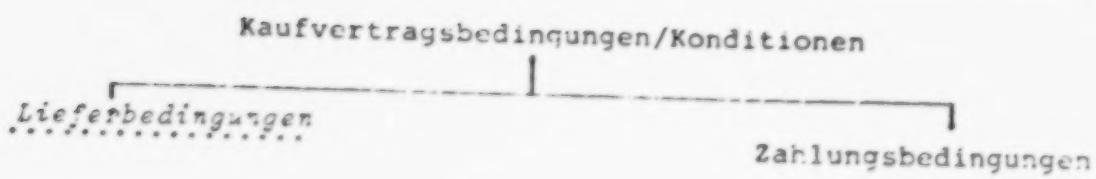
2

3

Beispiel eines Absatzweges:

Produzent
↓
Großhandel
↓
Einzelhandel
↓
Verbraucher

4

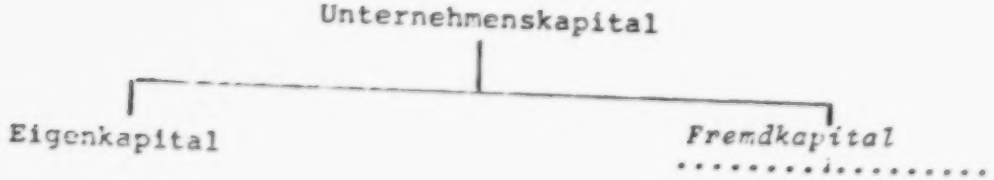


5

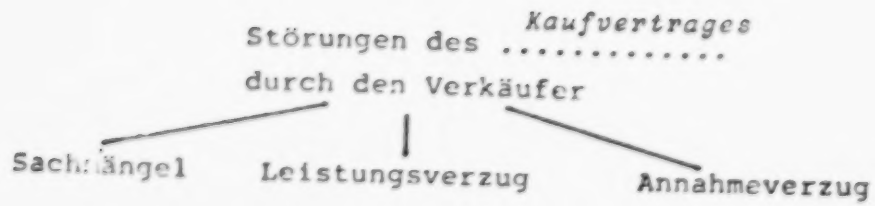
Selbständigkeit von Unternehmen

	rechtlich	wirtschaftlich
Interessen-gemeinschaft	+	+ oder -
Konzern	+	-
Kartell	+	+ oder -
Trust	-	-

6



7



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German is used throughout the test and there are no multiple choice items. The main criterion for evaluating a student's performance on the test is quality of content (of the spoken or written communication), technical accuracy and knowledge of lexical items (Grundlangenlexik). Correct gender, adjective endings and spelling are of secondary importance and are counted only if such errors make the text produced incomprehensible.

Once the test has been administered in 1985 we will know whether it is realistic for U.S. students. What we now know is that the test incorporates the real needs of the business world, since these needs were carefully established in consultations with chambers of commerce and business experts. We also know that it is designed at an optimal level of difficulity. Most importantly, the test assures us of a good "product" since students who have successfully passed the test have shown that they possess a high degree of competence. Ideally an undergraduate major which prepares students for this type of test (and competence in a business career) should incorporate beyond the general university requirements roughly thirty semester hours of language and area studies and thirty semester hours in business and economics; this includes courses in international marketing, comparative economic systems and international economics. The course work is followed by at least three semester hours of internship work in an international firm or abroad. Among the existing successful degree programs are the Language and International Trade B.A. and M.A. programs at Eastern Michigan University with now over four hundred students.[5]

Other degree programs or Business German course offerings exist in such institutions as Ball State University, University of Cincinnati, Purdue University, Pennsylvania State University, New York University Deutsches Haus, University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers University, SUNY at Stony Brook, Georgia State University, California State Universities at Fullerton and Long Beach and the University of Florida, to name a few. At Stony Brook a 1980 doctoral dissertation (Doctorate in Foreign Languages, D.A.) was, in fact, one of the first major projects in the development of a Business German course and course text. Since the department has used computers in the teaching of German since 1968, the design of software for functional language courses is now under discussion.

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For existing programs as well as those to be created the German Business Diploma will be a sound mesure of student achievement and perhaps even an indicator for future career success. Just as importantly, the Diplom can and should serve as a guideline for course and program content, teaching approach and course materials and a quality control agent. Ultimately the existence of such a diploma is certain to make the study of German for career purposes more attractive.

Such trans-Atlantic collaboration and the crucial support given by the German partners can perhaps not be duplicated in other language areas (for French, of course, the Diplome Superieur already exists), but the developmental process might serve as a model. Once similar quality control devices in the form of a Diplom exist in the other major languages, the foreign language profession will have considerable credibility with the business sector and be able to provide an important contribution to multi-national business.

NOTES

1. General Motors distributed copies of the speech to foreign language departments.

2. Chronicle of Higher Education, vol. XXIX, Nr. 1, August 29, 1984.

3. Those interested in a detailed description of the diploma and sample test questions should contact Dr. Manfred Heid, Goethe House, 1014 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10028, for the 1984 one hundred seven-page publication, Das Diplom Wirtschaftsdeutsch für die USA.

4. Professor Schaub has held an important leadership position in all activities related to the test, particularly for organizational and contractual arrangements. He and his foreign language colleagues have developed a successful Language and International Trade Program at Eastern Michigan University.

5. For information contact Professor Ray Schaub of the Department of Foreign Languages and Bilingual Studies, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197. The program is offered for French, German and Spanish.